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ABSTRACT

The education of women, involving both their educational/career ambitions and their concern for intimate relationships, is discussed. As traditional undergraduates enter liberal arts colleges, two important developmental tasks arise: establishing a sense of self independent of family and developing a capacity for intimacy. While today's college environment emphasizes career possibilities for women, many women retain the values traditionally viewed as feminine: thinking of others, showing caring and concern, and avoiding actions that could cause disapproval. The current educational process emphasizes the development of self-identity, but gives little attention to development in regard to intimacy. Compared to females, males tend to find identity issues easier to deal with and find that college work supports their efforts in this direction. They can postpone issues relating to caring and intimacy. However, female students often need to feel connected with others and may have difficulty integrating the drives toward self-improvement and intimacy. College programs emphasize high ambition and objectivity. It is essential to recognize the degree to which the traditional curriculum is organized around male questions and values and to insure that women's studies courses and materials are present in the curriculum. (SW)

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CAN YOU REALLY BE BOTH?
Some Thoughts on the Education of Women

by Jean Walton

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A friend of mine, active in a dean's office, told me recently that the most frequent question from her women students was "Can you really do both?" The question is an important one for colleges and has significance beyond the familiar issues of combining marriage and career. For the marriage/career conflict is just a surface manifestation of a more crucial question that lies deep in the educational experience of most college women.

The question is perhaps more accurately expressed "Can you really *be* both?" Can a woman be a thinking, competent, ambitious, active, successful human being *and also* a loving, caring, nurturant, responsible person who develops intimate relationships and a concern for those around her? Can these two selves coexist or do they compete with each other?

This central question—the connection between the drive to fulfill educational and career ambitions and the concern for intimate relationships—is profoundly important for women students. It is not well understood by college administrators and faculty; in fact, the college's goals and the experience it offers intensifies the sense of conflict from which the question arises. My aim is to clarify these issues and show why they assume so much more importance for females than for males.

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Essential Developmental Tasks

My particular interest is with traditional students in undergraduate liberal arts colleges. Two important developmental tasks normally come into focus for these students when they enter college. One is to establish a sense of self, an identity independent of home and family. Students begin to explore their own strengths, to question beliefs they previously took for granted, to work out their own values, and to develop the confidence to make plans for the future.

The second is to develop a capacity for intimacy. Students concerned with this task want to make significant contact with peers, to build close personal relationships, and to reach others on a deep and caring level.

The college program can and often does have a major impact on the first of these two developmental tasks. Independence and assertiveness are stressed, and the initial steps toward choice of careers seem to be a natural outcome of the college's program. Most students, both male and female, find the college experience helpful to career definition, but the move toward independence and self development it requires is likely to be less fully realized by women students.

Little difference is apparent in the first stages of this task. Research on the impacts of college on student development shows that college work in general frees students from traditional authoritarian patterns of thought. Both men and women normally show an increase during the college years in openness to new ideas, flexibility of thought, and tolerance of diverse viewpoints.[1]

However, there is an equally important second stage to this task—namely the development of

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trust in one's own judgment. To make effective use of his or her education one must move beyond openness and flexibility to personal decisions and commitments needed to shape a life of meaning in a complex, ambiguous world.

This is never an easy step. There is considerable evidence, however, that in spite of the difficulties, male students feel a stronger sense of pressure to move ahead and make the decisions that shape their future lives.[2] A man's sense of self is usually seen as linked with his occupational role, and his college work is viewed as preparatory for that role. The sense of external pressure to take the next step seems natural in this context. Independence, the capacity to act, the responsibility to be in charge of his life, all become part of the male's developing self image.

Women also think about preparation for the future, but they ex-

hibit less confidence, more unease, and much more uncertainty. Many writers, in fact, have commented on the tendency of women students to undervalue their own performance and to show generally lower levels of confidence about their future success than men in comparable situations.[3]

I have discussed the difficulty of this transition to independence with several women in professional life. The response has always been the same. "Yes, that last step—to become independent, to take charge, to be able to act—is a very difficult one. Furthermore, it's not only that there is no pressure from society to take it. There's an active pressure against such a move."

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Why is this step so difficult for women? How does their college experience differ from that of men?

Today's college environment emphasizes career possibilities for women, but other forces exert powerful influence on their lives, too. Along with career ambitions, many women retain the values traditionally viewed as feminine—values that lend them to think of others, to show care and concern, to value intimate relationships, to avoid actions that could cause disapproval. They find they cannot easily ignore that second developmental task, to make connections with others and achieve close personal relationships.

Carol Gilligan of Harvard University sheds light on the question. Her work indicates that most women speak "in a different voice" from that normally used by men, that women tend to follow a different pattern of development from men.[4] She does not claim absolute gender differences, only that two patterns exist, with one far more common in women and the other far more common in men.

A woman, according to Gilligan, is likely to have a central concern with affiliation, with her relationships to others. Her self at its core is seen as connected to others. Moral judgments grow out of a sense of responsibility to others and a desire to minimize hurt for all concerned. The woman is likely, in fact, to measure most proposed actions by their effect on others. The central concern of the man, on the other hand, is likely to be focused more on achievement and competition: the self is separate from and independent of others, and self development, with responsibility toward self, is seen as an important goal. Moral judgments grow out of a desire to insure a fair system that will protect the rights of each individual.

Gilligan emphasizes that the mature person grows beyond these initial concerns and develops both a strong sense of self with power to act and a capacity for intimacy expressed in a caring concern for others. Males, in her view, achieve the first more easily, and society encourages them in its development. They are likely to have greater difficulties as they try to incorporate the second, since the demands of intimacy may seem to threaten their move toward self fulfillment. Females, on the other hand, find it easier to develop intimate relationships, and society encourages this development for them. Their more difficult problems occur as they try to reach for the self development that gives them the power to act with competence and conviction. For them, the demands of the self may seem to threaten intimate relationships.

In the long view, there appears to be a satisfying balance in these findings. Both men and women need to integrate a strong self identity with a capacity for intimacy and a concern for others. Two strengths are needed. Each starts with an easier approach toward one and finds more difficulty in developing the other.

But there is an important way in which the parallel suffers. The task of integrating these two drives strikes men and women very differently during the college years. The educational process as it is currently understood emphasizes the development of the self identity, but gives little attention to development in regard to intimacy.

The male student, who finds the identity issues easier to deal with in any case, finds that college work supports his efforts in this direction. He can postpone the issues relating to caring and intimacy and define himself in college primarily as a striving, achieving person. His college work feeds that image.

The woman student, however, has a more difficult problem. If she is serious about her education, she will be drawn toward the same goals as her masculine peers. The thrust of the college program, especially with today's emphasis on equality, means that she will be asking the same identity questions, thinking of self development, planning a future career, viewing herself also as a striving, achieving person. But if Gilligan is right, and my observations support her thesis, the need to feel connected with others remains of central importance for women.

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Most women cannot easily lay aside the concern for human relationships and focus their energies fully on the move toward self fulfillment. To separate these drives and take them in sequence seems typical for males but nearly impossible for most females. The able, ambitious college woman needs, somehow, to integrate them. She needs somehow to free herself from inner conflict between her two needs. In other words, she needs to create a self image that incorporates the vigorous striving for personal excellence and a caring concern for others.

In earlier days, when discriminatory forces were clearly evident, women felt a very direct pressure against their own self development. The assumption was widespread that a college woman's plans for the future related primarily to mate selection, marriage, and motherhood. Career choices, if involved at all, played a very minor role. Many women then, consciously or unconsciously, pulled back from full engagement in academic work, believing that it was not really their role to develop their abilities to the fullest and participate actively in the work of society.

Today, of course, the expectation is shifting; there is a strong interest in careers for women and in their active participation in society. Many do move ahead strongly. The important question is what lies below the surface. Does the ambitious college woman feel centered in her program and secure in her values, or is there an uneasy feeling that she has had to give up or lay aside something of deep importance?

There are many signs of this ambivalence. A recent college graduate expressed her unease with the words, "I would really like to know why it is and how it is we always seem to battle feelings of competence." A recent summary of research on college-level cognitive development calls attention to the increased incidence of depression among college women, a depression that is reported to be related to women's inability to work through relationships before making personal career commitments.[5] Reports from psychologists working with adult professional women indicate the severity of problems that arise from unresolved conflicts between professional development and a sense of personal connectedness — from the failure to achieve integration of the two inner drives toward self improvement and intimacy.[6]

Accepting "Feminine" Values

What are the implications for an educational institution that begins to understand this need and to take it seriously? Efforts to encourage the full empowerment of women students can be successful only if the institution understands and accepts the woman's need to integrate her vision of her active, striving self with her perception of herself as a care-giving person in whom a sense of connectedness is vital. Major changes will be needed since most institutions do not encourage a push for excellence with a concern for the so-called "feminine" values. Indeed, most institutions seem to deny entirely the claims of the nurturant self.

Our educational institutions are hierarchical in nature and in their goals. They prize reaching the top, being the best. The ambitious, competitive, hard-driving student is encouraged in the lonely quest for excellence and honored for his or her success. Students are encouraged to separate themselves from the objects of study, to be cool, rational, and objective. The college program emphasizes high ambition and personal striving, with inevitable nuances of power and control. It stresses objectivity and allows no place for feelings.

What is needed is a clear validation of the "feminine" attributes of caring and connectedness, a validation that will have a major, and beneficial, effect on the institu-

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tion. These values belong in the institution and do not lessen or alter its commitment to excellence.

A first step in moving toward this goal is to look closely at the campus environment, to take a thorough appraisal of attitudes toward women and their values. Here the work of Sandler and Hall of the Association of American Colleges provides a helpful guide. Their reports detail the many discriminatory or belittling behaviors, some subtle, some overt, that characterize a "chilly campus" environment for women.[7] Any appraisal of attitudes toward women also requires particular attention to sexual harassment, which is widespread on campus and in many different ways demeans women and undermines their educational development.[8]

But it is essential to move beyond the study of existing characteristics of a campus and to break the traditional, harmful linkages between concern for others and self denial, between connectedness to others and dependence on others, between attention to feelings and inability to think clearly. If we are successful in breaking these links, or, to use Carolyn Heilbrun's term, in "reinventing womanhood," we can visualize the integration of the caring self and ambitious self by defining womanhood to include the concern and connectedness to others, the attention to feelings, associated now, not with dependence and self denial, but with a vigorous quest for competence, with personal striving and independence.[9]

It will not be easy to make such an image real. In spite of recent changes in attitudes toward women, there are still many voices in society that deny the reality of any such redefinition and that will fail to imagine women in heroic terms. Nevertheless, such a redefinition of womanhood holds the key to a fully satisfying education for women. Without it, many able women will never be fully engaged in their academic endeavors, never be fully free to move ahead wholeheartedly in their own self development. It is not easy under any circumstances to combine personal ambition and a deep concern for others, but it is a quest to which the whole self can respond.

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Illuminating the Female Perspective

One important step toward achieving a full understanding of this quest is to take advantage of the women's studies research produced during the last several years. It is essential to recognize the degree to which the traditional curriculum is organized around male questions and values, and to insure that women's studies courses and materials are present in the curriculum to illuminate the perspective of the female. This will not only increase understanding but will provide encouragement and help for those students trying to create a new image for themselves.

Let me add that a validation of the attributes of caring, cooperation, and connectedness and an attempt to emphasize them throughout the campus will have far reaching implications beyond the benefits to women students. These can only be touched on here.[10] Accepting the self-in-relation-to-others as having validity comparable to that of the autonomous, competitive self will surely lead to many changes in attitudes and practices in the institution. For example, one could expect less emphasis on authority and hierarchy and a greater respect by each individual for the ideas of the other; a decrease in adversarial politics and an increase in the consensual basis for policy decisions; an increase in sensitivity to individual human concerns and to individual differences; and a shift from lecture-

based to more collaborative learning styles of teaching.

But perhaps the greatest benefit will lie in the broadening of the educational goal for all students. Men as well as women will be encouraged to acknowledge their sense of connectedness to others, along with striving for personal achievement. They will understand the need to develop both to the fullest extent possible, and can set for themselves a goal of wholeness and full maturity. ■

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[1]A good summary of the research literature on student development is found in H. R. Bowen, *Investment in Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1977).

[2]See W. G. Perry, *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968) for a discussion of this transition, particularly in relation to male students.

[3]See E. E. Maccoby and C. N. Jacklin, *The Psychology of Sex Differences* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974). Also see the Report of the Brown Project, *Men and Women Learning Together: A Study of College Students in the Late 70's* (Providence, RI: Brown University, 1980).

[4]C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice, Psychological Theory and Women's Development.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[5]B. P. Gelwick, "Cognitive Development of Women." In N. J. Evans (ed.), *Facilitating the Development of Women* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1985).

[6]See the *Radcliffe News*, April 1984, for a discussion of a report by Dr. Irene Stiver, director of psychology at McLean Hospital. Also see *MS* magazine, July 1985, for an article by Suzanne Gordon on the work of psychologist Jean Baker Miller.

[7]B. R. Sandler and R. M. Hall, *The Classroom Climate: A Chilly One for Women?* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges, 1982) and B. R. Sandler and R. M. Hall, *Out of the Classroom: A Chilly Campus Climate for Women?* (Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges, 1984).

[8]See B. W. Dzeich and L. Weiner, *The Lecherous Professor: Sexual Harassment on Campus* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

[9]C. G. Heilbrun, *Reinventing Womanhood* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1979).

[10]For a fuller discussion of some possible changes, see, for instance, F. Howe, *Women and the Power to Change*, a volume of essays sponsored by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education (New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1975).

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